

# Family Connections

Volume 5, Issue 1, Winter 2006

## Federal and Missouri State Adoption Tax Credit

*The information below is not to be construed as legal advice. It is always advisable to consult a tax professional with individual questions.*

### Federal Adoption Tax Credit

Beginning in tax year 2003, families adopting a child with special needs from foster care were allowed access to the special needs tax credit without needing to document expenses. For tax year 2005, the tax credit is \$10,630 per child and you have this year and up to the next five years in which to use it. For families that adopted in 2002 or earlier, you can only claim the credit against expenses you paid related to the adoption process.

The first question many people ask or are asked by their tax preparer is, "**How do I know if my child is considered to have special needs according to the IRS?**"

The North American Council on Adoptable Children interprets the instruction to say: if you receive an adoption subsidy (assistance) for your child, that means the state that provides the subsidy has determined your child has special needs. Your adoption subsidy agreement is the evidence that the state has determined your child to have special needs. **Note:** This information is contained in the Instructions for Form 8839, found at [www.irs.gov/instructions/i8839/ch02.html#d0e285](http://www.irs.gov/instructions/i8839/ch02.html#d0e285) which is quoted below:

**Column (d):** A child is a child with special needs if all three of the following apply:

1. The child was a citizen or resident of the United States or its possessions at the time the adoption process began.
2. A state (including the District of Columbia) has determined that the child cannot or should not be returned to his or her parents' home.
3. The state has determined that the child will not be adopted unless assistance is provided to the adoptive parents.

If you check the box in column (d), be

sure to keep evidence of the state's determination in your records.

The second most common question is, "**What does this mean to our family?**" You or your tax preparer are the only individuals that can answer this question. However, following is additional information to help you figure it out.

Many people believe the Federal Adoption Tax Credit won't help them because they get a refund every year, but that isn't necessarily true. A refund means you have overpaid what you owe in federal income tax, so the IRS refunds you the amount overpaid. The tax credit is applied against what you owe, and could reduce it to \$0, which would increase your refund. The amount that you owe is the number you come up with from the tax tables (or the number in line 28 of the 1040A, or line 46 of the 1040). Here are some examples of how the tax credit

might benefit your family.

Family one is a couple who adopts a sibling group of two children with special needs. They typically have \$6,500 in federal income tax withheld from their paychecks, and the tax that they owe is \$7,000, which means they owe \$500 in April. Now, with the adoption tax credit, they have \$21,260 in credits, and this year they could use up to \$7,000 of the credit.<sup>1</sup> This will mean they get a refund this year of \$6,500, and will have at least \$14,260 of tax credit to carry over for up to four years.

Family two is a single mother who adopts a sibling group of three children with special needs. Typically she has \$5,000 in federal income tax withheld from her paychecks, and the tax that she owes is \$4,000, which means she receives a refund of \$1,000 in April. Now, with the

*continue "Tax" on page 4*

## Meet Edward

### A Boy Scout that likes to stay busy.

Edward is a handsome and adventurous young man. He just turned 16 in September 2005 and is excited about life! He is now applying for his first job at local fast food restaurants. Eddie loves sports, especially basketball. Eddie is involved with the boy scouts and likes to stay busy.

Edward is very outgoing, thoughtful and caring. He has a great sense of humor and an expressive personality. Eddie is talkative, but is also a good listener. Eddie does well in school, gets along well with others, and is quite likeable. Eddie has a minor cousin who he is extremely fond of and would like to keep in contact with him.

If you think that Eddie could be a part of your family, please contact adoption specialist Wendy Sowers at  
615 E 13th Street, Kansas City, MO 64106  
816-889-2233  
Fax 816-889-3191  
[Wendy.M.Sowers@dss.mo.gov](mailto:Wendy.M.Sowers@dss.mo.gov)



***“Parent to Parent” is written by foster/adopt parents that are in the day-to-day “trenches” just like you. Articles are the sole opinion of the author. Submissions may be made to [denisekelley@foster-adopt.org](mailto:denisekelley@foster-adopt.org).***

## **How to Mean Business without Being Mean by Deborah Hage, MSW**

*Deborah is co-director of Turning Point, a therapeutic agency that addresses both the therapeutic and parenting needs of children who have severe emotional and behavioral disorders due to early institutionalization, multiple moves, or abuse or neglect. She and her husband have parented two birth children, seven adopted children, and five children in therapeutic foster care.*

For families whose children have a history of abuse, neglect, multiple moves, and abandonment, a positive family environment can be hard to achieve. Children often resist cooperating. Parents' expectations are dashed, tensions and voices rise, and stress permeates the home. Parents do not like what they have become, but are desperate to gain some cooperation from their son or daughter. Regrettably, there is no magical list of techniques we can apply to transform ourselves into the parents we want to be or our children into the children we want to raise. We can, however, develop the capacity to mean business without being mean.

### **Parenting Is Attitude**

One key to meaning business without being mean is attitude—our attitude. When parents change their attitude, they change how they interact with their children. The process is the same when we ask children to change their attitude so their pattern of interaction with us will improve. We should not expect any more of them than we expect of ourselves.

To begin the attitude shift, parents must accept the simple fact that parenting is hard and is not likely to be just how we expected it would be. We may not live up to our ideal of what a parent should be and our children may not realize the potential we thought they would or should. That's reality.

When we let go of these expectations, we can accept what is and begin to defuse the disappointment or anger we feel when our children and our performance as parents fall short of our expectations.

### **Parenting Is Controlling Emotions**

While we cannot control a child's behavior, we can choose our reaction to the behavior. By the same token, though we cannot choose happiness for our child, we can choose happiness for ourselves. When parents become excessively unhappy because of a child's behavior, they are ignoring their personal emotional well-being and sacrificing a measure of stability for the child. The child also receives the unhealthy message that personal happiness depends on the people around us and that others are to blame for our responses.

Consider how professionals deal with misbehaving adults. Police officers don't start yelling at people who are pulled over for speeding. The speeders' actions do not affect the officer personally, so there is no emotional involvement. Instead, the officer just tells each violator about the law, how the person broke the law, and the resulting consequence.

If parents exhibit extreme emotionality at a child's misbehavior, the child thinks, "Wow, this sure is important to my parents. It's not nearly so important to me. No point in both of us worrying about it." The child might then back off of taking responsibility for his actions since the parents are so much more concerned about it than he is.

Words we speak in anger to our children diminish us and our children, and demonstrate that we are not in control of ourselves, much less anyone else. Parental anger makes children question our love since whatever we are angry about seems more important than they are. Then too, as soon as we raise our voice, become sarcastic, or take a threatening stance, our children may stop paying attention to the message and focus on personal safety. Put another way, things we say in anger can lose all potential to affect change since our children will focus on our anger instead of their own misbehavior.

To teach children how to control their negative emotions, parents must be able to control themselves. If the parent does not stay in control when angry and upset, how can the child learn that such a goal is attainable? Understand and appreciate that no one can make you act out emotions negatively; you choose your response to all events. Parents should not be puppets on strings their children pull.

When you feel overwhelmed by anger, model the behavior you expect of your children when they are angry. Breathe deeply, close your eyes, and silently count to 10. Go for a walk. Separate yourself from the situation until you calm down. Demonstrate that people can be very angry and still no one gets hurt, no one is verbally demeaned, and nothing is broken.

### **Parenting Is Teaching**

Demonstrating emotional control is one important parenting tool. Deliberate methods of enforcing discipline, assigning chores, and enabling children to make good choices are also ways to teach them to grow toward responsible adulthood.

We cannot make our children do anything. We can, however, set up situations where appropriate choices are rewarded and inappropriate choices have consequences. Some children will make suitable choices and some may not, but those who don't must understand that their choices are about them, not about their parents. The trick, of course, is to impose consequences in such a way that, no matter what the child chooses, the parent and other family members are okay.

Say your family is planning to go to a movie, but Sammie is acting out when you need to leave. You have several options. Sammie could still come to the movie (to avoid punishing the whole family), but not get popcorn or soda. Sammie could go to a baby sitter while the rest of the family goes to the movie. Parents could take turns escorting the other children to the movie while Sammie stays home. In all cases, Sammie experiences a consequence, but the rest of the family still gets to see the movie.

Another important lesson for children is that of reciprocity. Put another way, the more we give of ourselves, the more we will get back in return. The more we behave responsibly, the more privileges and rewards we have.

To effectively teach reciprocity, parents must not impose a task unless they know what the reward is if the child completes the task and what they will do if the child chooses not to complete the task. When caught off guard by a child's refusal to cooperate, parents find it much harder to avoid anger and confrontation. Planning for either eventuality helps parents stay on an even keel and keep a positive tone of voice.

**"Parent to Parent" is written by foster/adopt parents that are in the day-to-day "trenches" just like you. Articles are the sole opinion of the author. Submissions may be made to [denisekelley@foster-adopt.org](mailto:denisekelley@foster-adopt.org).**

When we deal with a child who is very likely to be uncooperative, we need to be especially careful about planning our responses. One useful technique that can short-circuit a child's habitual resistance and maintain a parent's emotional control is a double-bind or paradoxical directive—giving the child permission or telling the child to do what she is going to do anyway.

In such a scenario, if the child chooses the negative behavior her parents ask for, her parents win because she did what they told her to do. If she chooses to avoid the negative behavior to show her parents they can't tell her what to do, everyone wins because the child is making a good choice. When used appropriately, double binds move control battles from the parents to the child, and from outside the child to inside the child.

A classic example would be to tell a child who always throws a tantrum when asked to complete a chore that you are going to ask him to do something that will make him tantrum. "So," the parent would continue calmly, "you should go ahead and scream and yell and get that out of the way first." If the child pitches a fit, the parent is in control because that's what she asked the child to do. And parents have no reason to be upset if their child is following their directions. If the child defiantly declares he can do the chore without having a tantrum, the parent is still in control because the child has made a healthy choice.

Predicting for a child how she normally misbehaves under certain circumstances enables the child to make a different choice. The very foundation of healthy parenting is giving children the opportunity to make good choices.

### Parenting Is Modeling

Whether we intend it or not, our children will learn from our behavior. One important lesson for children is that parents have the right to take good care of themselves. For parents who have especially challenging children, self-care is also a crucial means of developing the capacity to mean business without being mean. So, sleep long. Eat well. Exercise. Enjoy a massage. Establish a regular date night. Get filled up by association with others. Surround yourself with people who support you.

And remember, as much as we all want our children to be happy, our job is not to

guarantee their happiness. Instead, our responsibility as parents is to demonstrate personal contentment, give our children opportunities for personal success, and offer rewards or impose consequences for the choices our children make.

By teaching lessons about emotional control, reciprocity, and task completion, parents give children keys to open doors to the rest of their lives. And it can all be done by parents with a positive attitude who are firm in what they expect and who, above all else, model that no one has to be mean when enforcing rules or imposing consequences.

*The article is reprinted with permission from the Winter 2005 edition of Adoptalk—published by the North American Council on Adoptable Children, 70 Raymond Ave., Ste 106, St. Paul, MN 55114; 651-644-3036. To read this article in its entirety or other articles, visit [www.nacac.org/lpas\\_resources.html](http://www.nacac.org/lpas_resources.html)*

## GET RID OF "GOTCHA" by Karen Moline

*Karen is a novelist, journalist, and ghostwriter who adopted her son, Emmanuel Thanh Sang, from Da Nang, Vietnam when he was 6 months old. They live in New York City.*

I could hear the whine coming closer and closer, until I could stand it no longer. "Gotcha!" I said in triumph. Another mosquito swatted to oblivion.

Gotcha is my typical response when I've squashed a bug, caught a ball about to roll under the sofa, or managed to reach a roll of toilet paper on the top shelf at the store. It's a silly, slangy word.

As such, it's the last word I'd think to use if someone asked me to describe my feelings on the day when I saw my child for the first time. I find the use of "gotcha" to describe adoption both astonishing and offensive. Aside from being wholly parent-centered ("C'mere, little orphan, I gotcha for good now!") it smacks of acquiring a possession, not welcoming a new person into your life.

Yet many adoptive parents have elevated this casual word into shorthand for "The Day I Got You." This past year, one parent went further: Margaret Schwartz declared September 15, 2005, the first annual International Gotcha Day, a day to celebrate adoption.

This was bound to happen, as "gotcha" has become thoroughly entrenched in adoption-speak: There are "Journey to Gotcha" blogs and

"Happy Gotcha Day" cards, banners, keychains—even crowns—available for sale on the Internet. At last Google, there were 2,480,004 hits for "Gotcha Day." Curious, I clicked on "Noah's Gotcha Day." Noah is a cat.

It didn't surprise me to find that adoptees have a slightly different feeling about all these gushing gotchas.

17-year-old Elena, adopted from Romania, agreed: "I wouldn't like hearing 'Gotcha Day' used in my family. To me it sounds like someone snatched you away from your birth family, or almost like you are a prize that was won...it has a gloating 'ha-ha' tone to it. We celebrate my Adoption Day and I like that." She added, "Being adopted is worth celebrating, and Adoption Day is respectful-sounding."

Adult adoptee Hanna Sofia Jung Johansson pointedly asked, "What is being celebrated [on Gotcha Day?]" Do the adoptive parents acknowledge their child's losses? 'Gotcha' for parents means 'lost-cha' for children who have been separated from familiar faces, smells, and surroundings."

Another adult adoptee, Eun Mi Young, is equally blunt. "While endearing to adoptive parents, 'Gotcha' is downright disrespectful to adoptees," she says. "What does this term imply? We use it when we grab someone who is running from us, or when we save someone from something, or when we're playing a game. We shouldn't use it for an event that recalls the loss of culture, country, and birth parents. So, use Gotcha at your own risk. At the least, your adult adoptee will look at the term with pained resignation. At the worst, with fury and loathing."

I ran this concept past Margaret Schwartz, founder of International Gotcha Day, and she conceded that perhaps "Gotcha" wasn't the best word. "I wanted to raise awareness with the general public about the joys of adoption," she told me, "and I'm open to changing the name of the event."

Why not simply call it "Adoption Day" or "Family Day," or, if there are already kids at home, "Siblings Day?" Why use a silly, slangy term to describe the day we became families?

Save "gotcha" for mosquitoes.

*Reprinted with permission from Adoptive Families Magazine. For more articles like this one, to subscribe, or to sign up for the monthly e-newsletter, visit Adoptive Families online, [www.AdoptiveFamilies.com](http://www.AdoptiveFamilies.com)*

## News to Use

### **"Tax" Cont'd from page 1**

adoption tax credit, she has \$31,890 in credits, and this year she could use up to \$4,000 of the credit.<sup>1</sup> This will mean she will get a refund this year of \$5,000, and will have at least \$27,890 of tax credit to carry over for up to four years.

Family three is a couple with five children who adopts a sibling group of two children with special needs. They typically have \$1,000 in federal income tax withheld from their paychecks, and the tax that they owe is \$0, which means they receive a refund of \$1,000 in April. Now, with the adoption tax credit, they have \$21,260, but with no tax liability they are unable to use any of the adoption tax credit this year. They can still claim the tax credit, but it has to be in the year that the adoption was finalized. The credit would carry forward for the next five years or until it is used up. The two most likely reasons a family would claim it is if their tax liability varies greatly from year to year, or if the children already in their household are near adulthood and may no longer be claimed as dependents (or take the child tax credit) in the next five years.

### **Information for filling out Form 8839: Qualified Adoption Expenses**

If you do your own taxes, you may have a couple questions when you fill out Form 8839.

**What do you do when they ask for qualifying expenses on line 5 and you didn't have any?** Go to page 4 of the instructions for form 8839, which can be found at [www.irs.gov/instructions/i8839/ch02.html#d0e640](http://www.irs.gov/instructions/i8839/ch02.html#d0e640), says: *But, if you adopted a child with special needs and the adoption became final in 2005, enter \$10,630 on line 5.* This means that you do NOT have to document qualifying expenses to take the credit.

**What if the tax you owe is less than \$10,630?** Then you will also need to fill out the Credit Carryforward Worksheet on page 4 of the instructions for 8839. This is how you are able to carry the remaining credit forward for up to the next five years or until it is used up.

Finally, if you receive adoption subsidy (assistance) for your child and have questions on whether it is taxable income or if you can claim that child as a dependent, read NACAC's fact sheet at [www.nacac.org/subsidyfactsheets/taxes.html](http://www.nacac.org/subsidyfactsheets/taxes.html).

If you have questions on the adoption tax credit, contact the North American Council on Adoptable Children 651-644-3036 or [adoption.assistance@nacac.org](mailto:adoption.assistance@nacac.org).

<sup>1</sup>If you can claim the child tax credit (see IRS publication 972) or other credits, you should claim them.

*This article was reprinted with permission from the North American Council on Adoptable Children.*

### **Missouri Tax Credit**

As part of Missouri's enacted legislation, HB 1453, \$2 million in adoption tax credits are set aside for the adoption of children who are wards of the state. You may even be able to claim the credit for adoptions that occurred in previous years.

Before proceeding, let's review what a tax credit is. According to IRS Publication 968, "The adoption credit is the amount that you subtract from your tax liability." The following information summarizes the information on the Missouri Department of Revenue website, <http://www.dor.mo.gov/tax/taxcredit/atc.htm>.

### **Special Needs Adoption Tax Credit**

**Purpose:** Provides a credit to assist in the non-recurring adoption expenses for a special needs child.

**Eligible Applicants:** Any person residing in this state that legally adopts a special needs child is eligible to receive a MO tax credit up to \$10,000 for non-recurring adoption expenses (i.e. home study, legal fees, travel) for each child.

**Eligible Activities:** The child must be a special needs child as determined by the Children's Division, a child-placing agency licensed by the state, or by a court of competent jurisdiction.

**How the Program Works:** To claim the MO Adoption Tax Credit, parents

must complete Form MO-ATC. A copy of the completed Form MO-ATC must be attached to the tax return the first year the credit is being claimed. Effective January 1, 2000, up to 50 percent of any tax credits earned for adoptions finalized after that date may be claimed upon placement of the child and the remaining 50 percent claimed after the special needs adoption is final.

**Eligible Use of Tax Credit:** The credit may be carried forward four (4) subsequent years. During the year of adoption, or any year in which the credit is carried forward, the credit will be reduced by the state's cost of providing care, treatment, maintenance, and services when the child is placed, with no intent to return to the adoptive home, in foster care or residential treatment licensed or operated by the Children's Division, the Division of Youth Services, or the Department of Mental Health, or when a juvenile court temporarily or finally relieves the adoptive parents of custody of the child.

**Authorization:** This tax credit may be applied to adopting parents' state income tax. This credit may be assigned, sold, or transferred.

**Funding Limits:** The adoption tax credit is limited to four million dollars per fiscal year. Two million is allocated for Missouri resident special needs children, and two million for non-resident special needs children.

Questions? Contact Missouri Department of Revenue, Division of Taxation and Collection at [taxcredit@dor.mo.gov](mailto:taxcredit@dor.mo.gov) or 573-522-2089.

### **Claiming Foster Children**

One of the most authoritative source for information on whether foster parents can claim a foster child is IRS publication 501, Exemptions, Standard Deduction and Filing Information. The document can be found on-line by going to <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p501.pdf>.



## News to Use

### Child Abuse/Neglect Hotline ... How to Minimize the Risk of Allegations

In a 2002 survey of Missouri's foster parents, 21% of the respondents reported allegations of abuse or neglect were made against them in the past 5 years. This is not far from the national findings that up to 25% of foster parents will be falsely accused of abuse, which has helped fuel the maxim, "It's not a question of 'if' an allegation will be made against a foster parent, as much as 'when' it will be made."

There are, however, some precautions that you can take. Jodee Kulp includes some tips in chapter 3 of her book *Families at Risk*. The following is an excerpt from her book, and is reprinted with permission from Louis & Company, publishers of *Fostering Families TODAY*.

\*\*\*

#### Steps a provider family can take to prevent maltreatment:

**Understand and follow all licensing regulations.** When a provider is accused of neglect or abuse and has not been in compliance with regulations, the likelihood of a negative licensing action is increased. (**NOTE:** View MO's licensing standards at [www.dss.mo.gov/cd/info/cwmanual/section6/index.html](http://www.dss.mo.gov/cd/info/cwmanual/section6/index.html))

**Maintain a positive relationship with the licensing and child's caseworker.** Make sure any predetermined variance from regulation is approved **IN WRITING** before-hand. Call the licensing worker and child's worker when positive things happen with the child. Don't make all your calls to the agency sound like problems or complaints. Let them enjoy the good days along with you.

Get as much information about the child as possible before you accept a placement, write it down or get it in writing. Keep a separate notebook for each child, a colored 25-cent pocket folder with a spiral notebook inserted in the pocket will do. A spiral notebook is good because pages cannot be torn out without upsetting the sequence of events. Don't use your computer because changes are too easy. Invest the

time to handwrite: Behavioral, emotional and physical issues; Medical attention, including current doctors and previous specialists; How many prior foster homes and placements has the child had? (Ask to speak to the previous foster family before the child comes to your home.); What respite is available? How are the potential caregivers related to the child?; School issues; Parental visitation.

**Don't be afraid to say no to a placement that will put you at risk or you are concerned about being able to handle.** Lay your pride down – you don't have the skills to care for every type of child.

**Pay careful attention to supervision and safety issues, especially for younger children.** Make sure family members understand safety issues – unplugging curling irons, fastening seat belts, locking medicine cabinets, and routinely checking to assure the well-being of all members of the household.

**Closely supervise children.** It is unwise to allow children to play unattended at any time. Do not have too many places

where children can hide. Leave nap room doors open and periodically check on children during these times.

**Develop family policies and follow them** concerning discipline, children's developing sexuality, toilet training, napping routines, hiring substitute caregivers, etc. File a copy of these with the licensing agency. (Make sure your rules follow the Division's policy.)

**Conduct daily safety checks and make sure all hazardous materials are put away.** Safety guidelines cannot be compromised.

**Never use, or threaten to use, corporal punishment as a means of discipline.**

This form of discipline is prohibited by licensing regulations. A parent is a model of appropriate behavior and a teacher of problem-solving and communications skills to the children they care for. If methods of discipline vary between birth children and foster children, discuss the variances with the child's worker.

*"Allegations" continued on page 7*

### Meet Devonta

#### **He hopes some day to drive a fire truck.**

Devonta really wants a family and home of his own. When asked about his favorite place to go, he simply said, "My house." Described as "adorable and inquisitive," Devonta is initially shy, but quickly warms up, and loves one-on-one attention. Devonta is 7 years old.

Devonta enjoys a wide range of playtime activities, including baseball and football, playing memory and picture games, singing songs, playing video games. He also likes drawing and making paper airplanes. His favorite school subject is spelling, and he hopes one day, to have a chance to drive a fire truck and to work at a job at church. Devonta especially hopes to be placed with a family that has a dog or a horse!

Devonta is free for adoption, and is ready to meet his "forever family."

If you would like to learn more about Devonta, please contact Maggie Smith, Adoption Specialist, Family Resource Center, 314-534-9350 x 315 or e-mail [msmith@frcmo.org](mailto:msmith@frcmo.org)



# Foster Parent Advisory Committee

## Local and state boards working for you

By Diane Bueneman, Chairperson

One way the Children's Division supports foster parents is through the on-going work of the Foster Parent Advisory Committee. Each area/region of the state holds local meetings headed by foster parents and supported by local Children's Division staff. The local boards work to resolve issues of local foster parents —i.e. problem solving, practice issues, and resource development. Some local boards combine meetings with training opportunities to assist parents in obtaining in-service hours. Any issues that cannot be resolved locally are brought to the Statewide Foster Parent Advisory Committee.

State Advisory Board Meetings are held quarterly. The goals of the Statewide Committee include the following: **Goal #1:** To use available internal and external data to identify systemic needs, and develop plans to address those needs, using resources available within the agencies involved and the community as a whole. **Goal #2:** To improve partnership between the Children's Division, other relevant state agencies (ie. Department of Mental Health), and foster parents through ongoing communication, input, and support. **Goal #3:** To work together with the Children's Division to clarify policy and practices, provide feedback and recommendations on present and proposed policies related to child welfare. **Goal #4:** Improve the Children's Division communication with, and resource families' knowledge of, Children's Division policy. **Goal #5:** To provide an opportunity for resource families, Children's Division staff, and the community to network and share resources.

Each region of the state is represented by at least one parent representative, elected by their local board, along with at least one representative from the Children's Division. The Statewide Committee is also made up of three foster parent associations--Midwest Foster Care and Adoption Association, Missouri Foster Parent Association, and the Foster and Adoptive Care Coalition--along with a representative from the Office of Child Advocate. To find out more about your local advisory board, phone or e-mail the individual listed in your area. If you are not sure which area you live in call one of the foster parent associations listed below.

### **Area 1—Northwest Region**

**Parent Rep.:** Marian Goodding; 660-938-4669; mjgoodmc@grm.net

**CD Rep.:** Amy Jackson; 660-258-3388; amy.jackson@dss.mo.gov

### **Area 2—Northeast Region**

**Parent Rep.:** Diane Bueneman; 636-928-2198; fisherofthelake@yahoo.com

**CD Rep.:** Lanette Bowring; 573-592-4090; lanette.bowring@dss.mo.gov

### **Area 3—Southeast Region**

**Parent Rep.:** Joan Lowery; 573-996-7534; bruceandjoan@semo.net

**CD Rep.:** Frances Gould; 573-290-5656; frances.j.gould@dss.mo.gov

### **Area 4—Southwest Region**

**Parent Rep.:** Robin Butts; 417-581-6475; robinlbutts@yahoo.com

**CD Rep.:** Linda Conrad; 417-859-2208; linda.h.conrad@dss.mo.gov

### **Area 5 - Kansas City**

**Parent Rep.:** Dorothy Patterson; 816-820-0599 (cell) or 816-220-1388 (home); dpatterson06@aol.com

**Parent Rep.:** Mary LeFebvre; 816-941-9506; laremare@aol.com

**CD Rep.:** Gretchen Wheaton-Weston; 816-889-2042; gretchen.j.wheatonweston@dss.mo.gov

**CD Rep.:** Patty Champion; 816-889-

2114; patty.champion@dss.mo.gov

### **Area 6 - St. Louis City**

**Parent Rep.:** Rene Murph; 314-961-2660 x 7774, 869-9429; murphr@webster.edu

**Parent Rep.:** Ann Barfield; 314-534-1645; fieldbar@swbell.net

**CD Rep.:** Annette House; 314-340-4918; annette.g.house@dss.mo.gov

**CD Rep. (alt.):** Angie Sample; 314-340-4859; angela.m.sample@dss.mo.gov

**CD Rep. (alt.):** David Swofford; 314-340-7085; david.r.swofford@dss.mo.gov

### **Area 7- St. Louis County**

**Parent Rep.:** VACANT\*

**Parent Rep.:** VACANT\*

**CD Rep.:** Susan Shelton; 314-426-8402; susan.a.shelton@dss.mo.gov

**CD Rep:** VACANT

\*For more information on filling a vacancy in your area, contact your local CD Rep.

**Missouri Foster Care & Adoption Association** Jim McKenna; 417-538-4362; jlissa@centurytel.net

**Midwest Foster Care & Adoption Association** Lori Ross; 816-686-0463; rross600@aol.com and Michelle Winberry; 816-965-9998; mfcaa@birch.net

Midwest Foster Care and Adoption

Association (MFCAA) continues to serve Foster, Adoptive and Kinship families in Missouri this year. In 2005, more than 3,000 children and families benefited from our programs and services. MFCAA provides a wide range of services from training and advocacy to food and clothing for children. MFCAA is also available to assist small support groups in Missouri with organization and development. MFCAA works with foster and adoptive parents and community partners to enhance the quality of life for Missouri children who have been abused or neglected. More information about MFCAA is available on the web at [www.mfcaa.org](http://www.mfcaa.org) or by calling 1-866-794-KIDS.

### **Office of Child Advocate**

**Steve Morrow**

**Toll free number: 866-457-2302**

The Office of Child Advocate for Children's Protection and Services, formerly known as the Office of the Child Welfare Ombudsman, would like to announce that Mr. Steve Morrow has been appointed by Governor Blunt as the new Ombudsman.

Mr. Steve Morrow served as the Chief Student Life Officer, Vice President for

Student Development until December 2004 at Southwest Baptist University. Morrow holds a Bachelor's degree in Education from Southwest Baptist University and a Master's of Administration from the University of Missouri.

Also new to the Office is a website: [www.oca.mo.gov](http://www.oca.mo.gov). Included on this website is this Office's Annual Reports to the Governor and a complaint form that can be filled out and sent to the Office for investigation purposes. Also, you can call the Office's toll-free number at 866-457-2302.

**Foster and Adoptive Care Coalition** Denise Kelley; 800-FOSTER-3; [denisekelley@foster-adopt.org](mailto:denisekelley@foster-adopt.org)

During the Holiday Season the Foster and Adoptive Care Coalition worked with partners KSDK News Channel 5 and the Junior League of St. Louis to grant 5,854 wishes of local foster/adopt families. The program also served as an additional recruitment tool, leading to double the calls of interested viewers wanting to know more about foster care and adoption. The project was a huge undertaking with many lessons learned. If you have questions or concerns please let us know. E-mail Little Wishes at [littlewishes@foster-adopt.org](mailto:littlewishes@foster-adopt.org).

FACC is gearing up for the 2006 Training Extravaganzas. The all day trainings will be held quarterly with each providing 7.5 hours of in-service training. Go to our website, [www.foster-adopt.org](http://www.foster-adopt.org) to view the 2006 training schedule.

FACC informs parents and professionals of local, statewide, and national "happenings" through the News You Can Use newsletter and eUpdates. If you would like to subscribe to either, contact us at [denisekelley@foster-adopt.org](mailto:denisekelley@foster-adopt.org). Additional information can be found online at [www.foster-adopt.org](http://www.foster-adopt.org).

### ***"Allegations" continued from page 5***

Carefully screen all helpers and substitutes, including relatives and friends. Make sure they understand licensing regulations, house rules, and any specific restrictions about individual children because of court orders and other rulings.

### **Other steps designed to prevent false allegations against provider families by parents or older children who may be angry or unhappy:**

***Always report suspected child abuse to local child protection authorities, especially after parental visits.*** For more information, see Chapter 4 in Families at Risk.

***Document any changes in behavior in children, including severity and length of these changes, especially after visitation or any changes at school.*** Include any action taken to deal with inappropriate behavior. Also document any unusual behavior the child has regarding social workers, police, or medical personnel. For complete details, see Chapter 14 in Families at Risk.

***Always document any serious conflicts with parents, children, social workers, licensors, or teachers and keep these records in a file.*** Request copies of these to be kept with the licensing agency.

***Keep parents informed of positive progress their child is making and any interesting things they might like to know about their child's activities.*** View yourself as a part of a co-parenting team that is attempting to reunify a family, not as a competitor for their children's loyalty.

The above information is only a portion of an article which appeared in the January/February 2004 edition of Fostering Families TODAY. Jodee Kulp is the author of Families at Risk, Our FAScinating Journey, and Best I Can Be: Living with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome or Effects, which was co-authored with her teenage daughter Liz.

To find out more about Foster Families Today Magazine visit their website at [www.fosteringfamilies.today.com](http://www.fosteringfamilies.today.com).

### **Meet Ronnie A future Marine Biologist.**

"Creative, funny, and smart," are words frequently used to describe Ronnie, a quiet young man who's hoping to be adopted. Ronnie is a bright youngster, with above-average intelligence, who does well in school and loves learning new things. Although he's an all-around good student, Ronnie's favorite subject is science. Ronnie is 13 years old.

In his spare time, Ronnie enjoys playing soccer, football, and baseball (both playing and watching). He's also an avid fisherman, who says he'd love to be placed with a family that had pets, enjoyed sports, and lived near a lake. Ronnie feels he would be happy in either a one-or two parent family, and thinks it would be great to have an older brother or sister! Ronnie has a close relationship with an older cousin, and hopes to be able to continue to have contact.

Ronnie's career goal is to become a marine biologist, and he's willing to put in the hard work to make it come true.

For more information about Ronnie contact Trish Sparks, Adoption Specialist, Jefferson County CD, at 636-797-9744 or [Patricia.M.Sparks@dss.mo.gov](mailto:Patricia.M.Sparks@dss.mo.gov)



## Youth Advocacy

### **ABC's of Advocacy: Advocating for the Betterment of Children**

**A**dvocating for children in foster care starts well before they are placed in your home. You can trace your advocacy roots back to the development of your homestudy. At this crucial stage of preparing for your role as a foster parent, you and your family were asked to consider what “type” of child you felt you could or could not care for in your home. Although your skill and comfort level has undoubtedly developed throughout your fostering experience, it is every child advocate’s primary responsibility to know those core physical, behavioral, developmental, and/or environmental factors that your household could not appropriately address. This is essential in the next stage of advocacy . . . making the right placement for a child in foster care.

**B**asic steps should be taken to ensure children are placed in a suitable home. Unless you are accepting a child as an emergency placement, you and the placing worker exchange information to determine if you have the capacity to meet all the needs of the child, including the child’s cultural identity, on a long-term basis. Every move is a failure in the eyes of a child. There are many questions that you should be prepared to ask the placing worker about the child. Of course there may be times when you may be asked to take a placement without all of the child’s information readily available. However, it is the responsibility of the worker (and your right) to be given additional information when learned by the Division. On-going, effective communication between you and the members of the professional team is the most essential tool that an advocate can possess.

**C**hildren’s adjustment to placement and reporting other day-to-day considerations is a major contribution made by foster parents acting as a member of the professional team. Foster parents are generally the best person to report the child’s progress, needs, and desires. Likewise, other members must share information with the foster parent in order to assist in providing appropriate care for the child. To assist in this exchange, foster parents are to be notified and invited to participate in all court hearings, family support team meetings, and to be provided with a copy of the case plan (CS-1). Some of the most frustrating experiences of fostering may come from exercising your rights. Although there may be barriers at times, it is important to fully exercise those rights whenever possible (ie. attending family support team meetings, providing pertinent documentation).

Serving as a member of the professional team doesn’t come without professional responsibilities. Below are some considerations that every advocate should keep in mind.

- Maintain confidentiality of the child and family at all times. You are privileged to sensitive case information and must take that responsibility seriously.
- Know the “players.” Make sure you know the professionals involved with the case (ie. child’s worker, Guardian ad Litem (GAL), Deputy Juvenile Officer (DJO), Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)). Develop a professional relationship with all members of the team.
- Don’t take on an adversarial role. Don’t assume that if a worker does not return a call that they are being disrespectful or unprofessional. We cannot say that this doesn’t happen, but generally it is the case that worker’s are in the field, overwhelmed with paperwork, and/or dealing with a crisis situation. It’s okay to be persistent, but always remember to be patient and professional.
- Document, Document, Document. Many foster parents find it helpful to keep an accordion file with all the child’s documents (e.g. health and school reports). Keeping a notebook to jot down quick daily happenings and/or injuries is another helpful tool many parents have used. Not only does this assist you in providing a report to the other team members, it also may act as a form of documentation should any allegations be made.

It is important to remember that an effective advocate does not have all the answers--they just need to know how to find them. Networking with other parents, professionals, local and national advocacy groups can help anyone advocate for the betterment of children in their care.

---

### **Student Financial Aid ~ Help Your Child Reach Their Career Goals**

Below are two very important funding programs for youth entering (or considering) college, technical school, or other accredited post-secondary education program. It is not too late to apply!

#### **Free Application for Federal Financial Aid (FAFSA)**

This form determines eligibility for federal grants, work study, and loans. It is important that the student/parent complete it as soon after January 1, 2006 as possible. Tax information can be estimated. Children in foster care are considered emancipated minors. The form can be completed on-line at [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov).

#### **Education and Training Voucher**

Children in foster care and those adopted from foster care at the age of 16 or older are eligible to receive FREE financial benefits from the voucher program. For complete details and to obtain an application go to [www.dss.mo.gov/cd/chafee/education.htm](http://www.dss.mo.gov/cd/chafee/education.htm). Your local Independent Living Coordinator can also help.



## Research

### Make the Difference in Your Child's Educational Success

Many times, children in foster care face additional educational barriers that lead to poor outcomes. The Vera Institute of Justice and the New York City Administration for Children's Services conducted a pilot project, Safe Start, to explore ways adults can assist in improving the school experience of children in foster care. The interventions were focused on addressing some of the typical educational difficulties of children in foster care, including poor attendance, poor academic performance, and greater incidence of behavior problems.

During Safe Start's 3 year project, the following barriers were identified as directly impacting the educational outcomes for children in foster care:

- Multiple placements that result in multiple schools
- Medical and court appointments that cause children to miss school
- Lack of emphasis on education by the child welfare and judicial systems
- Low expectations for educational achievement on the part of caseworkers, school personnel, and foster parents
- Lack of one adult who serves as a child's educational advocate
- After effects of abuse or neglect
- Lack of coordination between the child welfare and educational systems
- School policies that make it difficult to enroll children

To offset those barriers, Safe Start found that increasing adult involvement in the education of children in foster care would help children overcome many of these obstacles. They made two specific and relatively inexpensive recommendations:

- Assign primary responsibility for monitoring a child's education to one adult. They sited that in many cases there is a great deal of confusion over who is responsible for enrolling the child, signing permission slips, meeting with the teacher, and more. The key is for the "team" to come to a determination of

who the responsible party will be and to maintain accountability for that task by incorporating educational goals into case activities (e.g. FST, court hearings).

- Encourage foster parents to interact with the school and teachers. Foster parents can receive training on attending parent-teacher conferences, finding out important information, and communicating it to others involved so an appropriate plan can be developed.

As a result of the pilot project, the Vera Institute published a three-part packet to cover the themes of "Meeting the Challenges," "Adult Involvement," and "Enrollment and Transfers." Included in the packet are sample letters and forms to help in enrollment and release of records, as well as tip sheets for foster parents (in English and Spanish) regarding questions to ask at a parent-teacher conference and ways to help with homework. The packet, "Foster Children and Education: How You Can Create a Positive Education Experience for the

Foster Child," can be downloaded from the Vera website at [www.vera.org/publications/publications\\_5.asp?publication\\_id=241](http://www.vera.org/publications/publications_5.asp?publication_id=241).



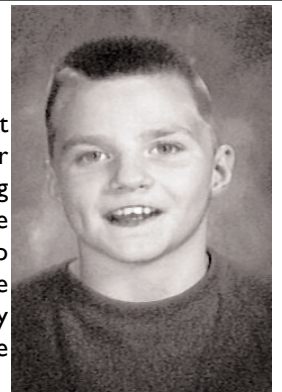
The information above was provided in the October 2004 e-mail edition of Children's Bureau Express. Visit them at <http://cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov>.

Children's Bureau Express is supported by the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and published by the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information and the National Adoption Information Clearinghouse. If you would like to subscribe to the e-mail newsletter, contact Children's Bureau Express at [cb\\_express@caliber.com](mailto:cb_express@caliber.com).

### Meet Joshua

#### *An entertaining and affectionate 11 year old.*

"Polite, courteous, and well-mannered" are words that describe Joshua, an entertaining and affectionate eleven year old who is ready for an adoptive family. Flying kites, jumping on the trampoline and playing with Spider Man toys are some of Joshua's favorite activities. He also enjoys playing with dump trucks and is always ready to eat pizza and ice cream! Because of autistic related issues, Joshua needs reminders about daily activities, and help staying on schedule. He does best when he is able to follow a consistent routine.



Joshua has lived with children of all ages, and is comfortable being with peers. He is in good health and likes to help around the house.

Joshua has a strong bond with his foster family, and adoptive parents will be asked to maintain contact with them through pictures, visits and letters.

To learn more about this pleasant young man, contact Paul Stevens, Children's Service Worker, Pettis County Children's Division, at 808 Westwood, Sedalia, MO 65301; 660-530-5923 or [paul.r.stevens@dss.mo.gov](mailto:paul.r.stevens@dss.mo.gov).

## Children's Division News

### Team Spotlight

Many "players" make up the foster/adopt team. This section highlights individuals to help you get to know your teammates better.



#### **Paula Neese ~ Interim Director of MO Children's Division**

**MO Department of Social Services • Children's Division • P.O. Box 88  
Jefferson City, Missouri 65102 • 573-526-6009**

Paula Neese was appointed as the Interim Director in late October of 2005. She is responsible for child welfare and early childhood services provided to families and children. She began her career with the Division of Family Services as a Social Service Worker in a rural county of northeast Missouri, working in all program areas. In 1988 she began her tenure in management, being a Social Services Supervisor I roving among four rural counties, and as a County Director in Schuyler County. From 1992 through 2005, she held several positions at the area/regional level including Social Services Supervisor III, Assistant Area Director and most recently, Northern Region Director. During that same time span, she spent over a year working at the DFS central office as a Program Development Specialist responsible for the development and coordination of the Family Preservation Services and Family Reunion training for staff and private providers statewide.

Ms. Neese has a BA degree in Sociology, with a concentration in Social Work and an MA degree in Counseling. She is also a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in Missouri.

Ms. Neese lives in Columbia, MO and has three children— Jessica, age 27, Vanessa, age 25 and Michael, age 22. All three live in Missouri. In her free time, Paula enjoys spending time with family (especially her two grandchildren), as well as reading and watching movies.

### Program Improvement

The Children's Division is reviewing current alternative care services, with an eye toward improving outcomes for the children who are in care, as well as streamlining processes. The division will be outlining changes in the future about training, reimbursing, contracting and licensing alternative care providers, as well as the way we reflect our values for the children we serve.

Among the anticipated improvements will be the goal of minimizing moves by the creation of a continuum of care for children requiring "specialized care" provided by career and behavioral foster parents. The contracting process for alternative care will also be examined for ways it can be streamlined and simplified.

Additional details will be shared in the coming months. We know we can count on our dedicated staff and providers to embrace the changes for the children we serve.

Just a reminder that May is Foster Care Month. The Children's Division is busy planning activities to recognize those who open their homes and hearts to children. In addition, the activities will serve to recruit additional families and individuals to foster, mentor or in some other way create a connection with children in alternative care.

If you have ideas you'd like to share for Foster Care Month, please contact Stefanie Wickers at [Stefanie.D.Wickers@dss.mo.gov](mailto:Stefanie.D.Wickers@dss.mo.gov). We will appreciate your thoughts as we move forward.

### Subsidy Update

The proposed changes to the adoption subsidy and guardianship program continue to be litigated. The trial date for the "adoption subsidy lawsuit is set for April 27-28, 2006.

The Children's Division will notify families who are impacted by the decision when a final determination is made.

---

### Department of Social Service Website Information on Demand

If you have not visited the Department of Social Services website, you are missing out on a valuable resource. The site, [www.dss.mo.gov](http://www.dss.mo.gov), has information specific to foster and adoptive care, statewide childwelfare statistics, and summaries of legislation impacting children and families.

Here are the main links you'll find there:

- Programs and Services: Children; Family Support; Health Care; Juvenile Justice
- Doing Business with DSS: Manuals & Bulletins; Other Information
- News/Media
- Reading Room: Quick Facts About DSS; Reports; State Legislation; Statistics
- Learn More About DSS
- Services A-Z

Hope you visit soon!

## Children's Division News

### Memo/Policy Update

Children's Division past and current memorandums and policies are available for review at [www.dss.mo.gov/cd](http://www.dss.mo.gov/cd). Below is a recent memo pertaining to the availability and use of the electronic fingerprinting system. **Please note that respite providers are now responsible for the cost of their prints.**

#### CD-05-76

#### Use of Electronic Scanning Service for Criminal Background Checks

We (Children's Division) have been fingerprinting all prospective foster parents, relative care providers and adult household members since January 28, 2004, as required by RSMo 210.487. We previously submitted fingerprint cards to the Missouri State Highway Patrol (MSHP) for processing. However, MSHP awarded a contract to Identix Identification Services (IIS) to provide electronic fingerprint scanning services in Missouri. This service is known as Missouri Applicant Processing Services or MOAPS. The Children's Division began utilizing this service in July, 2005. This service is also utilized by in home child care providers who are monitored through the Office of Early Childhood.

The electronic scan process should be the only process utilized; however, there may be specific situations in which the previous card and ink method may be used. This should be done in rare cases only, such as homebound adults living in a foster, relative, or kinship home. Staff should be aware that results on card and ink prints may take as long as 3 months to be returned. We are currently averaging 10 weeks for card and ink results. The rejection rate is also much higher using this method. Therefore, staff should provide sufficient time for these results to be returned so there will not be a delay in issuing or renewing a license. No provider should be issued a license prior to the criminal background check results being received.

Applicants may schedule their appointments either by phone or through the Identix website. The process for registration is as follows:

- Contact MOAPS to schedule the appointment. To schedule by phone call 1-866-522-7067. To schedule via the Internet, go to [www.identix.com/iis](http://www.identix.com/iis).
- The applicant will need to identify the reason they are being printed and that is to provide foster care for the Children's Division. Respite providers and biological parents will need to state that they are being printed at the request of the Children's Division.
- MOAPS staff will request additional identifying information. This information includes: Full name; date of birth; social security number; ORI number M0920360Z; OCA code. The OCA field must be provided to the applicant by the local office prior to the applicant contacting MOAPS. The OCA codes were previously provided to all counties.

Once MOAPS has collected the information, a date and time for the appointment will be set. Applicants may view available sites on the IIS website, [www.identix.com/iis](http://www.identix.com/iis) and clicking on Missouri. This will take you to the Missouri information page. Under the Current Project Status heading, there is a link within the text titled Missouri location web page. This will show all current locations and the number of days available for scanning.

It is important to be sure that the appropriate OCA code is utilized so alternative care providers will not be charged for their prints. There are separate letters for biological parents and **respite providers as we do not cover the cost of those prints.** The cost to them for utilizing MOAPS is \$50.95, which includes the fees of \$24 for FBI, \$14 for MSHP, and \$12.95 processing fee.

### Meet Ronnie & Ronnel

Ronnie (11) and his brother Ronnel (10) are about as close as two brothers can be. It's almost impossible to have a conversation with one and not hear all about his brother. They both enjoy drawing and sports.

Ronnie's current foster parent describes him as being polite and very helpful around the home. Ronnie describes himself as, "having good listening skills and accepting consequences when I get one." Recently, Ronnie got his first bike and when asked about his gift he replied, "I would give up everything I have for a family for me and my brother."

Like his older brother, Ronnel's only wish is for an adoptive family. Ronnel is caring and is always willing to help. His favorite school subjects are math, penmanship, and social studies. He describes himself as "polite, artistic, and a good friend." Ronnel says he is happiest when he gets to go on fishing trips.

For more information about Ronnie and Ronnel contact Sheila Suderwalla, Director of Project Teen Plus at 800-FOSTER-3 or [sheilasuderwalla@foster-adopt.org](mailto:sheilasuderwalla@foster-adopt.org).



**“Family Connections”**  
**Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition**  
**111 North 7th Street, 6th Floor**  
**St. Louis, MO 63101**

**In This Issue:**

**Adoption Tax Credit**

Federal and Missouri--page 1

**Hotlines**

How to protect yourself--page 5

**Youth Advocacy**

ABC's of advocacy--page 8

**Subsidy Update**

Pending litigation--page 10

**And Much, Much, More ...**

**Missouri's Protection & Advocacy System (MO P & A)**

MO P & A is a nonprofit legal services organization. There are various federally funded programs operated by MO P & A to protect the legal rights of persons with disabilities. MO P & A provides the following services: Information about services available through agencies in the community, advice to you about your legal rights, and assistance in resolving disagreements through mediation and negotiation. Trained information specialists, advocates and legal staff are available to assist you with problems. MO P & A is not a government agency--they are advocates and lawyers who can work for you. All inquiries are kept strictly confidential. Programs currently include:

**Protection & Advocacy for people with Developmental Disabilities** PADD helps secure the rights and services individuals with developmental disability are entitled.

**Client Assistance Program** CAP services include assistance in pursuing administrative, legal, and other appropriate remedies to ensure the protection of persons receiving or seeking services under the Rehab Act.

**Protection & Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness** Help secure rights and services to individuals with psychiatric disability being abused, neglected or denied legal rights. MO P & A provides advocacy services or conducts investigations to

address issues which arise during transportation or admission to, the time of residency in, or 90 days after discharge from such 24-hour care and treatment facilities.

**Protection and Advocacy of Individual Rights** The primary focus of the PAIR program is protecting the legal rights of people with disabilities guaranteed by federal laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation act, Fair Housing Act, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and the Air Carriers Access Act, as well as state and local laws relating to disability rights.

**Protection & Advocacy for Assistive Technology** The primary focus of the program is to provide individual representation to people who have been denied funding for assistive technology and to increase the availability of funding through systems change. An "Assistive Technology" device is any item that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities.

For more information about any of MO P & A programs, contact their intake office at 800-392-8667. Office hours are Monday-Friday 8am to 5pm. Additional program information can be found at [www.moadvocacy.org](http://www.moadvocacy.org).

**“Family Connections” is published and edited by:** Department of Social Services • Children's Division • 615 Howerton Court • P.O. Box 88 • Jefferson City, Missouri 65103 • [www.dss.mo.gov](http://www.dss.mo.gov) **In conjunction with:** Foster and Adoptive Care Coalition • 111 North 7th Street, 6th Floor • St. Louis, Missouri 63101 • 800-FOSTER-3 • [www.foster-adopt.org](http://www.foster-adopt.org)